

Edinburgh, 5th October 2023

Leith Central Community Council

planning@leithcentralcc.co.uk

Subject: Expressing Community Disappointment Regarding Approval of Planning Application at 139 Leith Walk [22/01563/FUL](#)

Dear David Givan,

We, Leith Central Community Council (LCCC), are writing to convey our deep disappointment and concern regarding the recent approval of the Planning application for the student housing development at 139 Leith Walk. While we understand that the decision was made by a narrow majority within the Development Management Sub Committee (DMSC), we firmly believe that this development is not in the best interest of our community, and we wish to express the reservations and the sentiments of many residents in Leith.

Our community has been actively engaged in the Planning process for the proposed student housing development since its inception. We have consistently raised concerns about the potential negative impacts of this development on the character of Leith, the well-being of our residents, and the overall quality of life in our neighbourhood. Despite our efforts to engage constructively with the Planning department and the developers, we were disheartened to learn that the application was approved with the smallest possible majority.

Our concerns about this development include, but are not limited to:

1. Halmyre Street Place Brief

The proposal to build 230 student beds, only 27 affordable flats plus 27 build-to-rent flats fundamentally misinterprets the Halmyre Street Place Brief which emphasises the need in Leith for environmentally sustainable social and affordable housing rather than student accommodation.

2. Student Housing Guidance

The proposal is at odds with the Student Housing Guidance which requires a minimum of 50% housing on sites that are bigger than 0.25ha.

3. Scale and Density

The proposed development is overly dense for the area and out of character with the surrounding architecture. It threatens the historic and cultural identity of Leith Walk. The proposal is also at odds with the Halmyre Street Place Brief, which clearly says it should not exceed the height of a traditional four storey tenement.

4. Community Impact

We fear that such a large influx of students in this densely populated area will place additional strain on local resources and negatively affect the sense of community that is integral to Leith.

5. Traffic and Infrastructure

The increased traffic and demands on infrastructure due to the development have not been adequately addressed, leading to concerns about congestion and the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

6. Affordability and Housing

There is a pressing need for affordable housing in our community. The decision to approve student housing at this location does not address this need and further limits housing options for local residents.

7. Daylighting

The proposal would be responsible for a large extent of windows at 19 Thorntree Street and 125-129 Leith Walk to fall or fall further below minimum daylight requirements, some of which are about to get less than half of the minimum standard of daylight.

8. Sense of Place

The proposal does not create or contribute towards a sense of place as it fails to provide decent, attractive new public spaces and street frontages along public routes through the site which does not feel safe.

9. Accessibility

The proposed affordable housing block has no accessible parking, therefore failing to meet a range of housing needs in Leith, including those of older people and people with special needs.

10. Commercial needs

The proposal only offers 3 commercial units which are not on the primary active travel route which can dramatically contribute to their future failure and ultimately lead to a retrospective conversion to add more student rooms within the existing student block.

11. Edinburgh Urban Design Panel

The panel has expressed strong concerns since the early stage of the proposal, with respect to the proposed level of student accommodation, general land use, layout, height, materials and security.

12. Community Engagement

Many residents feel that their voices were not adequately heard during the Planning process, leading to a sense of disenfranchisement and a lack of trust in the Planning system.

We acknowledge that the Planning Committee had a challenging decision to make, weighing the interests of developers against those of the community. However, we firmly believe that the decision to approve the application by the smallest majority reflects the divisive nature of this development and the valid concerns raised by our community.

In light of the above, we respectfully request the following actions from the Planning department:

1. Transparency and Accountability

We urge the Planning department to provide a comprehensive and transparent account of the decision-making process, including the factors that led to the approval of the application with such a narrow majority.

2. Ongoing Community Engagement

We request ongoing dialogue and engagement with the community to ensure that our concerns are taken into account during the development's construction and operation phases.

3. Mitigation Measures

We ask that the Planning department actively monitor the development's impact on the community and take appropriate steps to mitigate any negative consequences that may arise.

4. Non material variations

We express deep concern regarding the lack of transparency surrounding non-material alterations to approved Planning applications. It has come to our attention that, in at least one instance, the Planning department has retroactively permitted "private sale flats" to be relabeled as "build-to-let" flats designated for students, all without acknowledging it as a formal variation to the original application. The development at 48-50 Iona Street ([20/00972/FUL](#)) serves as a noteworthy example, warranting a formal investigation by the Council.

In the event that such significant changes were to occur at 139 Leith Walk, we strongly urge the Planning department to engage the local community in the decision-making process and facilitate public comments. This approach will ensure transparency and avoid sole reliance on the Planning department's discretion.

5. Reevaluation of Planning Policies

We believe that this case highlights the need for a thorough reevaluation of planning policies and guidelines which are often grossly misinterpreted by developers, especially in regard to developments of this nature in historically significant areas like Leith Walk.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns and your commitment to maintaining a transparent and accountable Planning process. We look forward to continued collaboration to address the challenges posed by the development at 139 Leith Walk and to ensure that the interests and well-being of our community are protected.

Kind regards,

Pierre Forissier
On behalf of Leith Central Community Council